



# That's No Grouper, That's My Hand

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It was supposed to be a routine training dive, with the divers taking photos of marine life on a reef. No one could have guessed one diver would tangle with a moray eel over its dinner: a grouper big enough to feed the entire dive team.

When the diver first spotted the grouper, he set down his camera equipment, removed his knife from its scabbard, and waited to move in for the kill. When an opportunity came, he lunged at the grouper, spearing it against the reef. The fish fought to get free, but the diver held it against the reef.

Suddenly, a moray eel appeared out of nowhere, lunged for the grouper, and mistakenly clamped on the diver's hand with its powerful jaws and razor-sharp teeth. The victim managed to rip his hand from the eel's grip, but he severed veins, tendons and muscle in the process. He kept his composure and applied direct pressure to the wound while his dive buddy came to help.

Both divers headed to the dive boat on the surface, where the dive supervisor immediately started first aid. When his bleeding was controlled, the victim was rushed to an emergency room. Doctors worked on his hand for several hours before they released him.

Although shark and eel attacks are rare, they're one of the greatest hazards that divers face. In most cases, such attacks occur as a result of the shark or eel misidentifying a diver as prey or as a threat. Sometimes, the attacks are a defensive or territorial reaction.

Shark and eel attacks can be frightening, but most injuries from them are not life-threatening and require only basic first aid. The first concerns after being bitten are to prevent further injury and to get out of the water. To control bleeding, dress and bandage the wound with a dry, sterile dressing and apply direct pressure. If the wounded area is a leg or arm, elevate it. If the bleeding continues, make sure the dressing is positioned correctly, then apply more dressings and increase direct pressure. Don't remove any of the dressings until the bleeding has stopped.

If you're still unable to control the bleeding, apply pressure to the arterial pressure point of the limb for up to 60 seconds, then slowly release the pressure. This action helps the blood to clot at the wound. Once all bleeding has stopped, bandage the wound firmly; keep the dressing loose enough, though, to ensure circulation. Finally, get medical attention as soon as possible.

In the incident described here, the victim stayed calm, reassessed his situation, and aborted the dive. He ascended at 30 feet per minute, thus reducing his risk of decompression sickness. When he reached the surface, the dive team reacted correctly, too. In fact, only one mistake was made in the whole episode: Neither the victim nor his dive buddy retrieved the grouper. ☹

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